



Department of Justice

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LOCAL TEAM MEETS WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL ALBERTO R. GONZALES, ENHANCES STRATEGIES TO COMBAT GANG VIOLENCE AND GUN CRIMES

United States Attorney's Office Emphasizes Importance of PSN to Reducing Drug and Gun Crime in Southern District of Illinois

Fairview Heights, Illinois – Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales this week brought together over 1,300 federal, state and local prosecutors, law enforcement officials, community leaders and other members of the Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) teams from across the nation to discuss efforts to reduce and prosecute gun crime. Two local representatives of the United States Attorney's Office participated in the fourth PSN national conference in Denver, sharing successful strategies for combating gun crime and gang violence. The Bush Administration has devoted more than \$1.6 billion to PSN since 2001, including nearly \$40 million that will be distributed to local task forces this year.

"Project Safe Neighborhoods is a street-level partnership that helps local leaders solve local problems," said Attorney General Alberto Gonzales. "Through this program, law enforcement at every level supports innovative strategies to combat gun crime and gang violence in communities across America."

The conference centers on PSN's many successes in fighting gun crime since the initiative was announced by President Bush in 2001, and on using PSN's partnerships and successful strategies to combat the problem of gang violence.

Acting United States Attorney Randy G. Massey emphasized the significant role played by PSN in fighting drug and gun crime in the Southern District of Illinois. "The Southern District of Illinois has a district-wide PSN initiative. The district's 38 counties have been divided into 11 regions based on geography and existing law enforcement task forces. Each region is assigned a DRAGUN (an acronym for DRugs And GUNs) Team to coordinate the work within that region. Each team is assigned an AUSA team leader, an ATF agent, a DEA agent, and an Illinois State Police agent. Additionally, each DRAGUN Team includes those state prosecutors, sheriffs, local law enforcement officers, and federal and state probation officers who choose to participate. This initiative has, to date, been extremely successful in combating drug and gun crimes in this district."

Since combating gang-violence can only be done by working in partnership with state and local law enforcement and community organizations, the Attorney General directed each U.S. Attorney to convene a Gang Prevention Summit in his or her district designed to explore additional opportunities in the area of gang prevention. These summits are to be held in the next eight months and will bring together law enforcement and community leaders to discuss best practices, identify gaps in services, and create a prevention plan to target at-risk youth within their individual communities.

The Attorney General announced that the Department of Justice released nearly \$30 million in grant assistance to support state and local anti-gang efforts of PSN task forces across the country. In addition, the Department will award \$10 million across the country to support PSN efforts to fight gun crime that is not necessarily gang-related.

These efforts will complement additional Department programs, such as the Attorney General's Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative, which has allocated a total of \$15 million to fund comprehensive prevention, enforcement and re-entry efforts in six sites: Los Angeles, Tampa, Cleveland, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Milwaukee, and the "222 Corridor," between Easton and Lancaster in Pennsylvania.

PSN conference training topics range from enforcement strategies to remove violent gang members and gun criminals from the streets, to school violence prevention programs, and building community partnerships. The strength of PSN continues to be its strategic mix of federal, state and local agencies and community leaders focused on law enforcement and crime prevention. Prosecutors pursue the strongest possible punishment for those who violate firearms statutes, while community partners aggressively educate their constituents about consequence of illegal gun violence and gang activity through services and resources provided by PSN.

For more information, please visit the PSN website at www.psn.gov.

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